

JOHN & JAMES DOBSON CARPET MILL (WEST PARCEL),
BUILDING NO. 19

Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5383-R

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51-PHILA,
695R-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
Mid-Atlantic Regional Office
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
JOHN AND JAMES DOBSON CARPET MILL (West Parcel), BUILDING 19
HABS No. 5383-R

Location:

4041-4055 Ridge Avenue
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

Present Owner:

Rouse Urban Housing, Inc.
1500 Walnut Street, 19th Floor
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19102

Present Occupant:

Mixed commercial and industrial tenants.

Significance:

Building 19 is significant as it documents the initial boom of the Dobsons' mill following the Civil War. One of the oldest buildings on the site, it is the only surviving structure with designated office space, indicated by the oak wainscoting on the first floor. The rubble construction of the building differs from that of the later buildings where a thick mortar bed embedded with stones was used.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

Date(s) of Erection:

1870, alterations by 1877 and 1895. Building 19 appears on the 1877 Hexamer Survey of the Falls of Schuylkill, Mill No. 1.

Architect:

Unknown.

Original/Subsequent Owners:

See Chain of Title.

Builder, Contractor, Suppliers:

Unknown.

Original Plans/Construction:

Building 19 was built of rubble construction relieved by rubble window arches. The original building was one story in height with a gravel roof. At the east end of the building was an engine house, at the west end an office. A finishing room was located in the middle. Adjacent to the office was a seven-story tower underneath which the present arched passageway was located.

Alterations/Additions:

By 1877, a second story had been added onto Building 19 and the roof was replaced. By 1895, the building, which still functioned as an office and finishing room was given a third story. Sometime during the twentieth century the seven-story stair tower was reduced in height to the three stories it is now.

B. Historical Context

Building 19 was constructed in 1870 to complete a courtyard bounded by Building 22 and a now demolished main mill building to the northwest. An arched opening fronted by a still intact wrought iron gate, provided access to the courtyard. These buildings, known as Mill No. 1, were used primarily for the production of blankets. The surviving buildings of Mill No. 1, including Building 19, represent the initial success and growth of the Dobsons' mill

after their capitalization on the dislocation of the southern cotton markets caused by the Civil War.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

Architectural Character:

Building 19 documents the earliest masonry construction techniques used on the west parcel of the Dobson site. The rubblestone walls are punctuated by regularly spaced window openings and a carriageway headed by a segmental arched schist lintel.

Condition of Fabric:

The masonry of the building is in generally sound condition, however the mortar has eroded and is severely deteriorated in some areas.

B. Description of Exterior

Overall Dimensions:

First floor- W elev.-232.2'; S elev.-151.4'; E elev.-29.2'; N elev.-19'; E elev.-7.2'; N.-15.6'; w elev.-13'; N elev.-116.6'. Upper floors- W elev.-232.2'; S elev.-163'; E elev.-29.2'; N elev.-20.6'; W elev.-5.8'; N elev.-142.8'.

Foundations:

Rubblestone.

Walls:

Three-story, rubblestone with regularly spaced window openings. The rubble of the walls is composed of small stones and a thick mortar bed resembling barn dash. East and west elevations are marked on each story along their entire lengths by holes made from wooden beam ends. The building's elevations are capped by a simple wooden bargeboard and modern flashing.

Structural System/Framing:

Masonry construction with interior timber framing.

Porches/Stoops/Balconies/Bulkheads:

North elevation has a corrugated metal awning and stairs at first story level which are carried on wooden beams projecting from the wall.

Chimneys:

None.

Openings:

Doorways/Doors:

West elevation- double-leaf door covered with plywood, wooden door at north end, may be original; also at north end is a ground story loading bay now infilled with cinder block and stuccoed. South elevation (beneath passageway from Scott's Lane)- central entryway flanked by infilled window openings. North elevation- opening on second story has been altered to a door, accessible from a freestanding exterior wooden stair. The arched passageway fronted by the wrought iron gate is visible on the east and west elevations.

Windows/Shutters:

West elevation- thirteen regularly spaced window bays; windows are headed by concealed wooden lintels. Most of the windows have been replaced with modern steel frame windows or infilled with plywood or sheeting. A few of the original double hung sash survive. East elevation- sixteen bays, the majority of the windows headed by wooden lintels, have been extensively altered to industrial steel sash, infilled or screened with metal mesh. The third floor retains most of its original sash however, these are severely deteriorated. North elevation - three window bays with steel and wood sash, window opening on second story has been altered to a door.

Roof:

Slightly sloped built-up roof system with a fair amount of deterioration.

C. Description of Interior

Floor Plans: Primarily rectangular unpartitioned space on first floor; upper floors have been partially divided by recent plywood walls.

Stairways: Two interior wooden stairways enclosed behind wooden partitions, exterior freestanding wooden stair accessing second story on east elevation.

Flooring: First floor- finished wood floor; upper floors- unfinished wood floors.

Wall/Ceiling Finishes:

First floor- walls are wainscoted with raised oak panels beneath simple beadboard paneling, trim is deteriorated. Upper floors- plastered rubble walls. All ceilings are exposed timber and planking.

Openings:

Doorways/Doors:

No surviving original or historic interior doors, door surrounds retain original transoms.

Windows:

All windows are recessed in unornamented plaster reveals with wood sills and wood surrounds. Some windows retain their original transoms.

Decorative Features and Trim:

See Wall/Ceiling finishes.

Hardware:

Original hardware, which is no longer extant, is presumed to have been utilitarian in character.

Mechanical Equipment:

Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: See PA-5383-C for heating system, air conditioning is N/A, ventilation by window mounted fans, exhaust ducts and air conditioning units.

Lighting: Modern and strip fluorescent, ceiling mounted, lighting.

Plumbing: Early-20th-century, ceiling mounted, sprinkler fire suppression system.

D. Site

General Setting/Orientation:

Building 19 is located on the eastern edge of the west parcel of the Dobson site with its primary facade facing southeast onto Scott's Lane. It is part of the continuous wall of mill

buildings that front onto that lane. The building's north facade forms a courtyard with Building 22. This group is on a lower grade than most of the site and not readily visible from the center of the west parcel.

Historic Landscape Design:

See Historic Context Section.

Outbuildings:

N/A.